(THOMAS GAMBLE)

A BIOGRAPHY OF THE LIFE OF

THOMAS GAMBLE

by

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MAYOR THOMAS CABLE

1868-1945
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THOMAS GAMBLE

THOMAS GAMBLE who was a Newspaperman, six-term Mayor of Savannah, Mayor of Savannah Beach, Historical Researcher and Writer, the Father of Armstrong Junior College, a Publisher, a Husband, a Father, a decorated Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, a conferee of the Chevalier Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, a recipient of a bronze medallion from the U.S. Pulaski Sesqui-centennial Commission, a recipient of the Lucas Cup trophy, and member of various other notable civic and social societies, commissions, and boards was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1869 and died in 1945 after adopting Savannah as his home in 1938.
INTRODUCTION

On Friday, July 13, 1945, at 9:25 a.m., the citizens of Savannah, Chatham County, the State of Georgia, the United States of America, and indeed the World experienced a loss at the death of Savannah's beloved Mayor Thomas Gamble. His kindness, knowledge, influence, and contributions towards the betterment of mankind endeared him in the hearts of many.

Mayor Thomas Gamble died away from his beloved Savannah while vacationing at the Alexian Brothers Rest Resort at Signal Mountain, Tennessee as a result of a heart attack caused by coronary thrombosis.

As the sad news of Mayor Gamble's death reached Savannah, Acting Mayor of Savannah Peter Roe Nugent ordered offices in Savannah City Hall to close at 2:00 p.m. in his memory. Judge David S. Atkinson adjourned Chatham Superior Court at 1:30 p.m. upon receiving the sad news. Judge Atkinson said that "he, as well as the city, had lost a great friend, and a man who was a very constructive and resourceful worker for every good of the city and its residents." The Savannah Public Library, which was one of the organizations with which Mayor Gamble was closely associated, closed at 1:00 p.m. upon learning of his death and remained closed until after his funeral. The flags atop the City Hall of Savannah and the United States Customs House were lowered immediately upon receipt of the news of Mayor Gamble's death.

Mayor Gamble's remains were brought home to Savannah, resting at the home he shared with his daughter, Helen Gamble Carr, until the time of his funeral.

His funeral was held at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 15, 1945 at the First Christian Church at the corner of Bolton and Howard Streets. The Rev. George West praised Mayor Gamble as having "fought the good fight" to his last breath as well as for his deep concern for world peace. Burial was to follow at Laurel Grove Cemetery, Lot 1560.
Hundreds of Savannahians from all walks of life attended the funeral, as well as the interment that was preceded by a city police motorcade to Laurel Grove Cemetery. Flowers were overflowing in abundance, representing fraternal orders, Jewish and Greek congregations, societies and individuals.

The gravesite of Mayor Gamble is marked by a granite slab that reads as follows:

"THOMAS GAMBLE
March 16, 1868
July 13, 1945

'In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof is no death'
Proverbs 12:28’ 15:1

Thomas Gamble’s marker is a simple memorial to his life, being smaller compared to the great accomplishments and contributions of his lifetime.

Thomas Gamble’s greatest memorial does not rest above his remains, but rather exists today, as it did at his death, embodied by the legacy of civic, political, and historical contributions made by him during his lifetime. It will be my formidable task of outlining the extent of Thomas Gamble’s living memorial that he gave unselfishly of his time and intellect to construct.
BACKGROUND

Thomas Gamble was born on March 16, 1856 in Richmond, Virginia. He was the son of Thomas H. and Mary A. E. Faunce Gamble, who were both natives of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Thomas Gamble used Jr. following his name until his father's death in 1915, even though he had no middle name as his father did.

Thomas Gamble's father, Thomas H. Gamble, was born on January 23, 1833. He was a grandson of Thomas Gamble, a wool merchant who emigrated from Leicestershire England to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1810. Thomas H. Gamble moved to Richmond, Virginia in 1858 where he was engaged in saw manufacturing. During the Civil War, he manufactured swords for the Confederate States of America. In 1871, he moved to Indiana. He died on February 21, 1915 as a widower at the age of 82.

Mary A. E. Faunce Gamble was born on August 5, 1839. She was a descendent of Thomas Dudley, the second colonial Governor of Massachusetts; Simon Bradstreet, the last colonial Governor of the commonwealth of Massachusetts; Anna Dudley Bradstreet, who is recognized as America's first poet; and Captain Simon Wainwright and "others representing the early settled families of the Massachusetts Colony."

Thomas Gamble married Miss Florence O. Kilpatrick of Savannah, Georgia on May 15, 1890. They were married by the Rev. T.H. Elmore, Pastor of the Savannah Christian Church.
Florence O. Kilpatrick Gamble was born on January 10, 1870 in Savannah, Georgia, being a daughter of John F. Kilpatrick who was a native of Bibb County, Georgia, and his wife Helen Rebecca Kilpatrick who was a native of Savannah.32

Born to the union of Thomas and Florence O. Kilpatrick served as Helen Gamble who married Roy Screven Carr; Thomas Weldon Gamble who married Miss Emily Quartersman; William Kilpatrick Gamble who married Miss Mill Clark;33 and Alma Marie Gamble who died in infancy.34

Roy Screven and Helen Gamble Carr made their home in Savannah, living at 626 East 41st Street, along with Thomas Gamble.35 This property was purchased by Thomas Gamble in 1917, with an adjoining lot having been purchased in 1921.36 This property, which included the house, lot, and household effects, was willed to Helen Gamble Carr. In addition to the home, Helen Gamble Carr was bequeathed 30 percent of the residue of her father's estate. Roy Screven Carr, husband of Helen Gamble, served along with Thomas Weldon Gamble as Co-Executors of the Last Will and Testament of Thomas Gamble.37 Roy Screven Carr held the position of City Treasurer of Savannah.38

William Kilpatrick Gamble made his home in Fulton County, Georgia.39 In his father's will, he was bequeathed $2,500 in cash and 50 percent of the residue of his estate.40

Thomas Weldon Gamble made his home in Chatham County.41 Since its incorporation in 1919 until 1937, Review Printing and Publishing Company was managed by Thomas Weldon Gamble. In 1937, the corporate charter of Review Printing Company was surrendered to become a co-partnership between Thomas Weldon Gamble and his father Thomas Gamble.42 Thomas Gamble supervised the publishing aspect of the business and Thomas Weldon Gamble supervised the printing aspect of the Review Publishing and Printing Company.43 Thomas Weldon Gamble was willed 40 percent of the residue of his father's estate.44
Florence O. Kilpatrick Gamble, wife of Thomas Gamble, died on Sunday, November 4, 1939 while residing in a private nursing home at 130 East Victory Drive at Drayton Street from a "cerebral hemorrhage, terminal pitting, and ventral hernia." The almost forty-year marriage of Thomas and Florence O. Kilpatrick Gamble was ended by separation and eventually divorce. About 1930, Mrs. Gamble made her residence in Asheville, North Carolina. Her family brought her home to Savannah after she became ill.

Funeral services were held for Mrs. Gamble and were officiated by the Rev. J. Martin of First Presbyterian Church where she was a member. The service was followed by interment in the Gamble Family Lot (#200). There is no visible marker identifying her gravestone.

Mrs. Gamble's mother was Ellen Rebarer Kilpatrick, a descendent of a very distinguished St. Augustine, Florida family. Mrs. Gamble is shown in Chatham County Deed records purchasing at least several properties prior to her husband Thomas Gamble's first real estate purchase in Chatham County in 1905.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gamble lived in various homes before settling at 626 East 41st Street. Among their other homes are 62 Full Street in 1890; 118 West Gaston Street in 1903; and 305 East Mall Street in 1915.

Some other properties purchased by Thomas Gamble in Chatham County includes property at the northwest corner of 49th and Habersham Streets that was purchased in 1917. The deed contains a racial restrictive covenant which limited use of the property to those of the white race. Such clauses were very common at that time.

In 1920, Thomas Gamble purchased part of Lot 13 on Tybee Island for $2,300. The property is described as having a beach frontage and near the Tybee Railroad. In 1930, Thomas Gamble purchased additional property on Tybee Island. This property had an 80 foot frontage on the beach and a depth of 343 feet, which constituted nice oceanfront property.
Thomas Gamble considered himself first and foremost a newspaperman. He expressed his love of writing throughout his entire career as he produced many articles, books, and scrapbooks that are of great historical value.


A brief personal item appeared in the Richmond, Virginia Dispatch of March 25, 1888 that stated "Thomas Gamble, lately connected with the Whig of this city, has gone to Savannah to accept a position on the Times." But in Thomas Gamble's own words, "the Dispatch did not say the position was accepted because the 'blizzard' induced me to seek a warmer climate ... for which I have always felt grateful." The blizzard that Gamble was referring to was a four day snowstorm that lasted four days and resulted in loss of life.

He arrived in Savannah by train on the Plant System at their dilapidated frame depot at Liberty and East Broad Streets. From there he walked to the office of the Savannah Times where he was to begin his association with Gayway Hartridge and Frank Weldon.

The first controversial story that Gamble reported on for the Times was a conflict between city government, business, and the citizens regarding a switch from Sun Time that was presently in use to Standard Time. The new Standard Time won out only for a brief while. The Savannah Times for which he worked, was ardently opposed to the new Standard Time. Thomas Gamble described the incident as follows:
"The City Council, after a sharp fight, ordered all clocks set back 36 minutes earlier than usual, so that all clocks and registers could register the new time, but Savannahians were in a fighting spirit. The blood of their revolutionary ancestors rose 120 degrees. They would not stand for such a radical change." 70

Gamble analyzed the fighting spirit of Savannahians when he wrote "sometimes this fighting spirit has rendered good service -sometimes it has approached the ridiculous." 71 He offered one instance where this fighting spirit was beneficial to Savannahians when he spoke about the proposed brick courthouse that was to have been built on the corner of Abercorn and York Streets that would have required tearing down the old U.S. Marine Hospital. Gamble wrote that "plans for a commonplace brick building were abandoned and a beautiful marble structure was erected on Bull Street ... thanks to the war waged against an inferior and characterless structure." 72 Based on his sentiment expressed here, I doubt that he would be very happy with our newest federal buildings that are located off of Whitaker Street with their tile that has been likened to that belonging in a bathroom.

In his years as a reporter, he observed that "time moves relentlessly on, but the taxpayer and the taxpayer remain at odds." 73 He wrote once that "after my baptism in the spirit of Savannah, I began to follow as a reporter the struggles of the local real estate owners." 74 He also noted that even when real estate owners formed organizations with hundreds of members opposing high taxes in 1988 they were unsuccessful. He wrote in retrospect that "Despite the outcries against taxes, building went merrily on" in Savannah. 75

He moved to the Savannah Press, now the Savannah Evening Press, which he owned, as their first City Editor when the paper was founded by Pleasant Alexander Stopwall in 1890. He continued in this position until 1895. 76 Later he served as Editor to the Effingham County News and the Bryan County News. 77
In 1890, he founded the *Weekly Naval Stores Review*, which he edited and published. The magazine covered the trends in the naval stores industry. He wrote for and owned this magazine and the *Naval Stores Yearbook* until his death when his will provided that these publications be sold to Mrs. Claudia Linder Ham. From 1907 until 1912 Thomas Gamble was Editor and Publisher of the *Daily Times Recorder* of Americus, Georgia. During this time, he travelled between Americus and Savannah.

Later, he would write editorials for the *Savannah Morning News*, but 1912 marked the end of his ownership of a newspaper.

Many of Gamble's writings on history and culture were printed in newspapers, never to be bound in book-form, except when pasted in scrapbooks. These articles are numerous and were printed as he would write them in the *Savannah Morning News*.

Some of the works on which Thomas Gamble's legacy rests so securely consists of his published works that include *History of City Government of Savannah* (1901); *History of Bebele, Whitefield's House of Mercy in Georgia* (1902); *History of Naval Stores Industry* (1921); *Savannah Duels and Duelists* (1927); *Love Stories of John and Charles Wesley* (1927); and *Life of General Casimir Pulaski*. (See Appendix)

His *History of city Government in Savannah* is but one of the most valuable works compiled and written by Gamble. This work made the City records more accessible than they had ever been before. He compiled and wrote this work while Secretary to the Mayor of Savannah.

One of the great pleasures of reading the works of Thomas Gamble is knowing that he carefully researched his topics, taking painstaking measures to insure that his works were accurate. His grandson Thomas Creven Carr, son of Helen Gamble Carr, recalls many evenings that his grandfather would leave the supper table to go to the library where he would work to carefully verify that facts involved in whatever he was working on at that time.
As one might conclude, the greatest legacy of Thomas Gamble was a legacy that lives on with us today—his historical research and writings. Thomas Gamble must have loved his adopted city immensely to have worked so hard to preserve its' history and culture. In a series of four articles written by Gamble in 1938 commemorating his fifty years in Savannah, he directs attention away from himself and towards the history of Savannah.86
POLITICAL CAREER

Thomas Gamble's political life in Savannah began in 1894 as he worked with William W. Osborne to establish the Citizens Club that was to exert political influence for many years to come. He was affiliated with the Democratic Party.

In 1896 he obtained his first government position as Chief Clerk to the Savannah Commissioner of Public Works. Thomas Gamble exhibited a flair for political life in this position.

He was appointed secretary to Mayor Herman Mayers in 1899. Gamble's ability as a secretary was immediately recognized. He served as Secretary to the Mayor until 1906, just prior to his acquisition of a newspaper in Americus, Georgia.

Thomas Gamble was not absent from his former position of Secretary to the Mayor for long. He returned in 1913 and retained that position under three Mayors who were Richard J. Devant, Wallace J. Pierpoint, and Murray M. Stewart. The fact that he served as Secretary to the Mayor for 18 years under four different Mayors attests positively to his value in that position.

Thomas Gamble was elected and served as Mayor of Savannah Beach at Tybee Island from 1926 until 1932 when he resigned to become Mayor of Savannah. His administration as Mayor of Savannah Beach is noted for the construction of groins and bulkheads that were to thwart erosion at the north end of the beach; the construction of oceanside board walks and parking spaces from 13th to 15th Streets; and the introduction of traffic lights.

When asked to comment on the new, more revealing bathing suits that were appearing at the beach in 1932, Gamble was quoted as saying, "I am not a brave enough man to presume to dictate to the daughters of Eve as to what they should wear on the beach or anywhere else."
He went on to say that the bathing suits of years past were then seen as immoral, but were seen as acceptable now.\textsuperscript{100}

The New York Times reported in 1932 that Thomas Gamble had gone "from newspaper reporter to Mayor of the state's oldest city" in the recent elections when he defeated Charles B. Russell, Savannah lawyer, in a spirited campaign.\textsuperscript{101} The Christian Science Monitor reported that "Savannah is to have an editor Mayor."\textsuperscript{102}

Thomas Gamble remembered his loyalty towards the over-burdened taxpayers of the city immediately upon his inauguration as Mayor of Savannah by cutting his own salary as Mayor.\textsuperscript{103} One paper reported that "Mayor Gamble commences his term by an inspiring announcement that he has decreased his own salary. In this he has shown a proper regard for the taxpayers of the city."\textsuperscript{104}

The highlight of Gambles tenure as Mayor was probably the establishment of Armstrong Junior College in 1935. He is credited with proposing a junior college for Savannah\textsuperscript{105} so that the capable students of Savannah who were unable to afford attending school away from home would not be without an opportunity for obtaining a post-secondary education.\textsuperscript{106} He is reported to have told friends that the establishment of Armstrong Junior College was to him the "crown of all his efforts."\textsuperscript{107} Gamble worked hard and succeeded in stirring public enthusiasm for the project.\textsuperscript{108} His own personal efforts resulted in Mrs. Carl Neltz, widow of George Armstrong, making the initial gift of the Armstrong residence at Bull and Gaston Streets that was to house the college.\textsuperscript{109} As Mayor, he obtained the needed support for the establishment of Armstrong Junior College from the city council who became the underwriters of the project.\textsuperscript{110} A building on the old Armstrong campus on Monterey Square at Bull and Wayne Streets was named Thomas Gamble Hall in his honor.\textsuperscript{111}
When the campus was moved to its present site on Abercorn Street Extension, the building that houses the History and Language Departments was named for him in his honor. What a fitting tribute to Mayor Gamble who has been called the Father of Armstrong to have the building that houses the students and professors of two of his great intellectual loves—history and journalism—to be named in his honor.

In 1935 while Mayor of Savannah, Gamble was appointed to the Advisory Board of the United States Conference of Mayors by Mayor La Guardia of New York City. It was an honor for Mayor Gamble to be appointed since the U.S. Conference of Mayors was the most important municipal association at that time.

Mayor Gamble's administration was committed to the continued growth and prosperity of the city. Towards this end, the city purchased several sites along the Savannah River and was able to induce Union Bag and other industry to Savannah.

In 1937 after four years as Mayor of Savannah, Mayor Gamble retired from politics, or so he probably thought, not knowing that he would again be called upon to serve as Mayor from 1939 until his death in 1945.

During his last several terms as Mayor, as through all previous terms, Gamble presented Savannah well to the outside world while setting an example for future politicians to emulate. Several people that I have talked to in this current day remember Thomas Gamble with admiration and fondness. All of what has been said about Mayor Thomas Gamble may sound too good to be true, but his reputation does truly seem to be as good and true as his record indicates.
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND
ACCUMPLISHMENTS

Thomas Gamble's middle name could have been INVOLVEMENT. He was an active participant in a wide variety of organizations. During his many years of community involvement, he served as President, Chairman, Organizer, or Leader of many of the groups with which he associated. His efforts towards the betterment of mankind were often recognized. Recognition of Thomas Gamble's achievements extended beyond Savannah, including the country, and indeed to other parts of the world.

Thomas Gamble once wrote that "In my own opinion, our country today needs a re-baptism in the Spirit of 1776, and the patriotic societies of all kind can help materially in bringing this about." He was a member, and twice elected President of the Georgia Society Sons of the Revolution. He also was a member and participant in other historical organizations that include the Georgia Society of Colonial Wars, Georgia Historical Society, New England Historical and Genealogical Society, the Gov. Thomas Dudley Family Association, the Georgia State Commission for the Marking of Historical Sites, and by appointment of the Governor was a member of the State Bicentennial Commission.

His religious faith was reported in one source to have been Presbyterian, but his obituary states that he was a member of the First Christian Church of Savannah. According to Thomas Screven Carr, grandson of Thomas Gamble, Florence Kilpatrick Gamble (Mrs. Thomas) was of the Presbyterian faith, while he does not recall his Grandfather being a member of any particular church. Mr. Carr said that his Grandfather was rather liberal in his religious beliefs and attended a wide variety of churches where he knew the Pastors, Priests, Rabbi, or had friends who were members. He went on further to say that his Grandfather did attend First Christian Church regularly in his final years.
Thomas Gamble was presented the Lucas Cup trophy in 1935 "for having done the most worthwhile thing for Savannah that year in his work for the establishment of the Armstrong Junior College." He was a member of the College Commission and served as Vice-Chairman from 1935 until 1936 and served as Chairman in 1937 until 1938.

In 1939 he was presented a bronze medallion by the U.S. Pulaski Sesqui-centennial Commission for promoting friendship between the United States and Poland. In 1929 the Polish government conferred on him the Chevalier Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in appreciation of services rendered in the fostering of a closer relationship between Poland and the United States. Gamble wrote and published a book called Life of General Casimir Pulaski and had taken part in the U.S. Pulaski Sesqui-centennial celebration.

In 1935 the French government conferred on him the decoration of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, which Gamble attributed to the hospitality that was shown to the French war ship d'Entrecasteaux when it was in the Port of Savannah in October 1934.

Thomas Gamble was a member of the Savannah Public Library Board of Managers for twenty-two years, which included the years 1901 until 1907 and 1916 until 1932. He was one of the organizers and charter members that instigated the effort and gained Carnegie Foundation funding to build the original portion of the library that stands today on Bull Street. He served as Chairman of the Board from 1928 until 1932.

Other organizations that he was a member of include the Ancient Landmark Lodge of Masons, Savannah Aerie No. 330 of Eagles, Savannah Lodge No. 183 of Elks, and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.
Thomas Gamble was an active and productive man who used his involvement in human organizations to further his causes and interests that were beneficial to the citizens of Savannah. The many organizations of which he belonged, and led, lend evidence to the idea that Thomas Gamble, who always considered himself a newspaperman, left this world better than he had found it. Perhaps Savannah may one day again be fortunate enough to adopt another son that will try as hard to make his mother Savannah a better place as Thomas Gamble strived to do throughout the fifty-seven years that he made Savannah his home.
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98. Savannah Public Library, Main Branch, Vertical File. Thomas Gamble.


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Freemasonry and Good Citizenship. Savannah, October 33rd, 1934.

A history of the city government of Savannah, Georgia, from 1790 to 1901. Comp. from official records under the direction of the city council. 1900.

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